



CRS Issue Statement on U.S. Diplomacy

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The United States conducts diplomacy to promote and protect U.S. national interests in the international arena. To advance U.S. interests abroad, the Department of State utilizes both the traditional tools of diplomacy and the use of new tools in its bilateral and international relations. These traditional tools include U.S. diplomats applying their skills in analyzing and reporting on events to U.S. policy makers, as well as advocating the U.S. position to counterparts in foreign ministries in order to develop agreements and form alliances addressing common concerns from nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction to trade agreements. Traditional diplomacy also encompasses using various tools to achieve strategic objectives such as training foreign military and security forces to help fight international crime and terrorism; providing grants and sales of military weapons on favorable terms; or using foreign assistance for other than development or humanitarian reasons. But diplomacy today also requires new skills and new emphasis. The need for public diplomacy is being re-emphasized, and a new appreciation for public diplomacy has developed with its use of academic, cultural, and leadership exchanges; America Center multi-media facilities; Internet social networking; and international broadcasting, to reach beyond governments and speak to a nation's citizens to establish new relationships. Many believe today's diplomacy requires a new relationship between traditional diplomacy and development assistance where the goals are no longer viewed solely to achieve strategic ends but serve to provide both humanitarian aid and an investment in the growth of developing countries. Many also believe that new skills and ways of thinking are required of the Foreign Service as diplomacy becomes more transformational, and expeditionary with work in democracy promotion and in supporting weak and failing states.

Many observers suggest that while the international system has changed markedly since the end of the Cold War, U.S. diplomatic practices and attitudes have not adapted sufficiently. The United States continues to be the world's main superpower, but some suggest that the role of nation states has diminished in the face of many more actors on the world stage and new criteria determining influence and standing. Observers also suggest that U.S. leadership is being challenged and its motives questioned by governments and people around the world. Where once the U.S. government was the source of news and information about its policies, today new information technology allows citizens of all nations to receive news and information from a vast variety of official and non-official sources.

It is in this new international environment that U.S. diplomacy operates to preserve and promote national interests while transitioning to meet new requirements. It is also in this environment that the Congress considers personnel and program resources to meet the new demands of the international system. Major legislative vehicles for the Congress to express its views on U.S. foreign policy include the Foreign Relations Authorization Act (FRAA), and amendments to the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) of 1961. Congress has also created and expressed its views about programs through the annual State Department, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations legislation, and in other legislation such as Defense authorization legislation.

Through its legislative and oversight roles, specific questions Congress might consider include the following:

- Are the civilian agencies appropriately resourced in terms of programs, personnel, and training to carry out the many new requirements of diplomacy?
- Do the civilian U.S. foreign affairs institutions have the capacity to respond quickly and adequately to international opportunities and challenges? Do their structure and culture allow sufficient flexibility to respond to changes, or do too many layers and a bureaucratic mindset hamper flexibility?

- What should the relationship be between U.S. foreign affairs institutions and new actors in the international arena including the military, multinational businesses, private foundations and other non-government organizations that work on broad issues such as human rights including women's rights, good governance advocacy and training, and building economic infrastructure in developing countries?
- What should be the role of U.S. foreign assistance in addressing foreign policy strategy and humanitarian development?
- Is the United States failing to adapt to rapid changes in information technology and international communications? How can public diplomacy be used more effectively to tell America's story and establish long lasting relationships with the people of other countries? What is the appropriate balance between putting U.S. diplomats in non-secured structures away from the embassy compound and providing the citizens of other countries the opportunity to have easy access to U.S. facilities and learn about the United States?
- As foreign affairs agencies increasingly use contractors to carry out their work, are these agencies reducing their ability to have those skills as part of core competencies handled by their own employees? Are these agencies becoming contracting organizations with policy decisions being influenced by contractors who often do the research and information gathering, as well as implementing programs and initiatives?
- Are current structures and resources for arms control and non-proliferation policy adequate for the broad and diverse requirements in this area?
- How important are multilateral organizations and their programs to the United States, and what should the United States' role be in those organizations?

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